Fall 2013

A Light in the Pharmacy

Marc A. Sweeney
Cedarville University, msweeney@cedarville.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/pharmacy_publications

Part of the Christianity Commons, and the Other Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences Commons

Recommended Citation
Sweeney, Marc A., "A Light in the Pharmacy" (2013). Pharmacy Faculty Publications. 25.
http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/pharmacy_publications/25
WHEN I WAS IN full-time pharmacy practice, a patient’s husband came to talk with me about his wife’s medications and challenging health concerns. She had seen several physicians and specialists, been through multiple diagnostic tests, and had been hospitalized for “heart problems.” The couple was so discouraged because they could not figure out why nothing seemed to work. After spending some time with the husband and going through all of his wife’s medications, the problem became apparent. The wife had confused her medications and was taking her heart medication incorrectly, resulting in all of her health issues. Ultimately, we prevented further unnecessary medical visits and hospitalizations. The husband could not stop weeping as he thanked me for taking time with him and for the insight about his wife’s care. That experience opened a door for a new relationship with that family.

Another woman, diagnosed with depression, was prescribed medication to treat her disorder. She was suicidal and desired to end her life before even trying her medication. When her pharmacist, who happened to be my wife, read what was behind the woman’s emotional state, she engaged the woman in conversation and ultimately prayed with her. That time of conversation and prayer created a brand-new trust relationship that deepened with time.

The health care system is full of knowledgeable pharmacists. But when those pharmacists are followers of Christ — known for their compassion, integrity, and discernment — interactions with patients can be eternally significant.

by Marc Sweeney

Cedarville is intentional about preparing Christ-centered pharmacists to influence the profession for Christ. From its earliest days, this purpose has informed everything about how the School of Pharmacy was built and how it operates. But does it matter, really, if your pharmacist is a Christian? Dr. Marc Sweeney, Dean of the School of Pharmacy and Professor of Pharmacy Practice, shares why it matters to him and why it should matter to you.
Challenges

As individuals are taking ownership for their personal care, they are finding the health care system challenging to navigate. Costs for health care and prescription drug insurance have continued to rise, placing financial burdens on patients and their families. Patients are looking for answers to many questions; however, in many cases, they do not even know what questions to ask. The amount of information is daunting. How is a patient to know why a test was ordered and if it was really needed? How would he know if he’d been overcharged for the test or if his doctor had correctly interpreted the results? How does a patient know when she should pursue a second opinion? Could a $5 medication be used in place of a $100 medication? Is there solid evidence that the prescribed medication actually works?

Further, patients need to know why they are taking a particular medication and whether it will interact with other medications, prescription medications, vitamins, herbs, and foods they eat. Patients need an advocate, and in many of these circumstances, a trusted pharmacist can help.

People can embrace challenges as either barriers or opportunities. The challenges of the health care system have created significant opportunities for Cedarville’s School of Pharmacy. God has brought together a team of individuals who depend on prayer and embrace the centrality of Christ, the foundation of the Word of God, and the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit to influence lives. We have a unique opportunity to develop and train pharmacists to meet our society’s increasing needs. We are training future pharmacists who will bring a message of hope to a world looking for answers ... even the core question of how to heal the soul.

Influence

Many Christian pharmacists have good intentions to come alongside their patients to see best possible outcomes, but they often struggle with how to be a true “light” (Matt. 5:14–16) in our health care system. Like Christian professionals in every field, some dim their lights out of fear of persecution, while others have become aggressive laser lights causing pain and fear among Christians and non-Christians alike. Some shine their lights while on the mission field only to switch them off when they return to their daily practice setting.

The School of Pharmacy’s faculty and staff are working intentionally to shape students’ perspectives about what it means to live for Christ and let their faith manifest in their practice settings. We seek to provide the right balance of addressing patients’ physical and emotional needs, but also helping patients explore their spiritual needs. Our graduates should be ready to address our society’s most difficult questions (cultural, ethical, and political) by applying biblical wisdom to those challenges. They should foster humility and embrace collaboration. The quality of their interactions should cause their patients to see the light of Christ reflected in them.

As a hospice pharmacist, I had a 4-year-old patient who was struggling with pain. His parents, physician, and nurse relied on me to provide solutions to bring him comfort at the end of his life. As we worked together to care for the child, I had opportunities to share that my compassion and care were rooted in my love for and dependence upon Christ.

Plan

Our mission is to train students to become top pharmacists in the profession. Our motivation and desire is quite different than other schools. We recognize that our students, outcomes, and impact are all from God. We desire simply to be good stewards of the resources God has entrusted.

To accomplish this significant task, we have built the following priorities into Cedarville’s School of Pharmacy:

1. Through the undergraduate Bible minor and biblical integration across the curriculum, pharmacy students have a biblical foundation prior to entering the professional program. The professional curriculum will build upon this foundation.

2. The curriculum is a hybrid of team-based learning, problem-based learning, and “faith-integration fostering” active and collaborative learning necessary for lifelong practice skills. Learning must continue the day after graduation — self-initiated and collaborative education is vital for survival in the current health care system.

3. Students are intentionally exposed to the unmet needs in the health care system, including underserved populations and patients with significant financial hardship, to foster compassion and innovative strategies to meet those needs.

4. One-third of the curriculum occurs outside of the classroom to ensure application of classroom skills in an appropriate manner.

5. Christian pharmacists from many different areas of practice (e.g., community, hospital, long-term care, family medicine, hospice, cardiology, oncology, infectious disease, research, wellness) speak to our students to broaden their understanding of how faith and practice can intersect.

6. All students conduct a multiyear research project to foster critical and innovative thinking.

7. All students take a business and leadership module where innovative ideas can be shaped into business models for implementation. Students are encouraged to operate above the market by creating the companies, organizations, and positions to meet the unmet needs of our health care system.

8. Times of prayer, mentorship, devotions, service, fun, encouragement, and challenge are all integrated into the professional program experience to provide the balance that supports lifelong success.

We are hopeful that our graduates will desire to serve Christ, love others, wholeheartedly serve people, and be a great and influential resource within the health care system. We believe we are building a program that develops exceptional practitioners who will care for patients and take the saving message of Christ to a hurting world.

Marc Sweeney is Assistant Academic Vice President, Dean of Cedarville’s School of Pharmacy, and a Professor of Pharmacy Practice. He received his B.S. in pharmacy at Ohio Northern University, his Pharm.D. from The Ohio State University, and his M.Div. from Southwest Bible College and Seminary. He has served at Cedarville since 2008. You may contact him at msweeney@cedarville.edu.